

### Social Media and Policy Making in Pakistan

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## **Social Media and Policy Making in Pakistan**

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**Abstract:** The study highlights the role of social media and policy making in Pakistan. For this purpose, case study methodology has been employed. The study examines trend analysis of different public problems being discussed on social media (Twitter). Four cases have been selected purposefully. The trend analysis of selected public problems show that twitter users expressing their views. Transgender case of Alisha was identified highlighted by social media. Consequently, the KPK government took the notice of the case and allocated Rs. 200 million for the transgender community. The issue of Panama leak has been debated inside and outside of the Parliament of Pakistan. Social media users have also participated in the discussion and have floated their suggestion to resolve the issue. The problem of malnutrition in Baluchistan was also identified and highlighted on social media. Subsequently, the government of Baluchistan took the notice of the problem and introduced the 'Scaling up Nutrition' for malnutrition women and children in Baluchistan. Honor killing cases have been the hot topics among social media users. The case of Zeenat Bibi was also debated on social media. Parliament of Pakistan has taken up the issue and passed a law related to honor killing. Social media is vibrant, dynamic media.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Policy Making, Honor killing, Transgender, Pakistan*

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### **1. Introduction**

Social media is a paradigm shift from the traditional media. Social media is getting popular day by day among the youth in Pakistan. Social media in Pakistan is used for five purposes; breaking the stories that are ignored by news agencies; gather people for public protest and campaigns; highlight the issues related to humanity from worldwide; campaigner for a social cause and remove the gap between citizens and government (Kugelman, 2012).

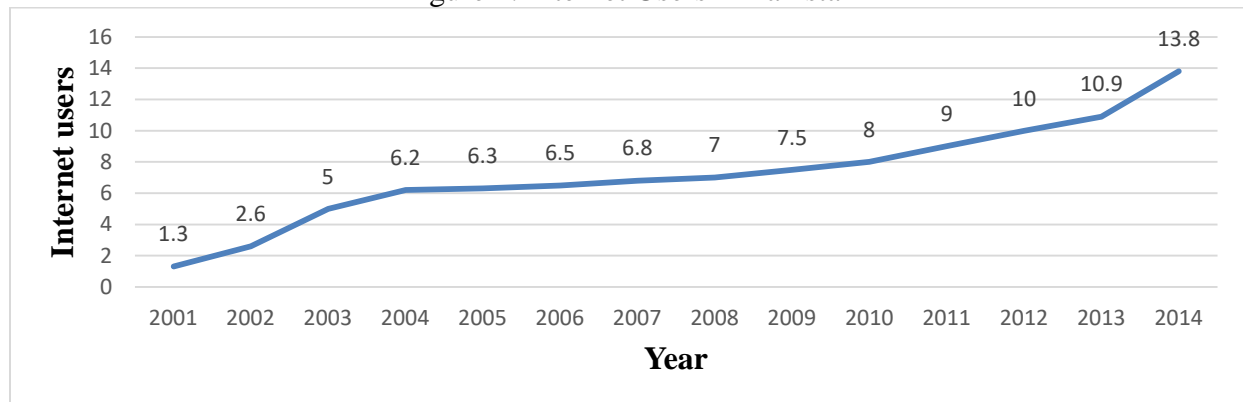
In comparison to other forms of traditional media, social media provides information within seconds of any incident around the globe. People can generally discuss their views and opinions with different individuals on social media websites. Social media also provide information about those events that are not highlighted by other traditional means of communication. Social media is eliminating the gap between citizens and government officials (June 2011). Social media was the first to break the news of Osama bin Ladin's death (June 2011), before, United States

government confirmed the news. Social media has made governments more accountable and transparent, which is helpful in bridging the gap between citizens and policy making bodies. Moreover, it strengthens the trust among citizens (McNeal et al. 2008; Tolbert and Mossberger 2006; Welch et al. 2005). In the past, various researchers have analyzed the relation between citizens and government and interaction of citizens with other citizens and concluded that such interactions would create a positive impact on policy cycles (OECD 2007; Kuzma 2010; Chun et al. 2010; Picazo-Vela et al. 2012; Bertot et al. 2012).

Previous literature specifies the role social media will play on agenda-setting stage of policy making (Curini et al. 2014). Social media plays an important role at the agenda-setting stage and other stages of policy making cycles as well. Policy makers can use the opinions of citizens through social media by monitoring their reaction to the policy alternative sets. Social media can be used by policy makers at the policy evaluation stage by carrying out surveys. Thus, social media offers a massive amount of data that can have a positive impact on policy making process (King 2014).

The use of social media to impact policy making cycle is fairly new in Pakistan. It is mainly due to the fact that in early 2000s, the internet penetration rate was quite low and people were not used to social media. However, with the passage of time and with increased internet penetration, the use of social media also increased. Figure 1 shows the internet users from 2001 to 2014. In 2001 there were only 1.3 internet users per 100 people and in 2014 13.8 people were using the facility of internet.

Figure 1: Internet Users in Pakistan



Source: World Development Indicators

Magro (2012) in 'A review of social media use in e-government' reviews how public officials are using internet facilities, social networking sites and social media in their offices. The previous literature shows that there is room to explore social media impact on policy making. To fill this gap the present research is conducted with the aim to examine the role of social media and policy making in Pakistan. The present study is exploratory in nature, as previously the use of social media to influence policy making has not been studied in Pakistani context. Thus, the present study uses four cases debated on social media and trend analysis has been carried out of those cases to investigate how social media is influencing Pakistani policy makers.

## 2. Literature Review

Earlier studies on social media and policy making conducted by Fernandez, Wandhoefer, Allen, Cano & Alani (2014) examined social media users' involvement in policy making in Germany.

The study used time series data by monitoring one week data for the month of January, 2014. Data were collected from various social websites. The study found that very small percentage of users generated the information related to policy. The study pointed out that most of the discussion on policy topics came from news agencies rather than citizens.

Soroka, Lawlor, Fransworth, and Young (2013) while reviewing various theories of agenda setting as well as issue framing in Canada, pointed out that sometimes media may give the wrong impression about the problem. The study used climate changes and natural calamities as their context and presented results through statistical tools by using articles posted related to climate change and natural disasters. The study concluded that significant relationship existed between media and policy making. The study specified that there was an increase in the coverage of climate issue after the disaster and events in the media.

Leavy (2013) examined the interaction between citizens and government through social media for shaping better policies. The study interviewed 25 experts from variety of disciplines on development programs of United States. The study found that social media significantly impacted the policy. Social media is a newly emerging field that helps the government in policy decision as well as in public service delivery. The study point out that information obtained from social media is quite useful, but it can become stronger and reliable if collaborated with any other data source for the verification. The results highlighted that social media help to produce early failure indicators.

Androutsopoulou, Charalabidis and Loukis (2015) investigated social media monitoring as a potential source in understanding citizen needs and feeling regarding certain policy decisions in Europe. The study found that there is high to very high usefulness for evaluating the feelings of citizens regarding certain policies by using social media monitoring. Similarly, Sigillo and Sicafuse (2015) examined the influence of media and community sentiment on public policy. The study used the recent event of murder of 2-year old child in Florida as a case study. The study findings point out towards a positive relationship between media and policy.

Wu, Atkin, Lau, Lin, and Mou (2013) investigated the influence that micro blogging created on agenda-setting of policy making process in China. The study used case study approach and time series analysis and found that after the train smash, online media played a crucial role in setting the background for agenda setting. Social media provided citizens the information that was overlooked and mistreated by the traditional media. Sina Weibo is the only online micro blogging source that created more impact on agenda setting during the incident rather than other sources.

Skogerbo, Bruns, Quodling, and Ingebretsen (2016) in their study focused on social media role in the election campaigns in Australia, Norway, and Sweden. The study used comparative analysis between Australia, Norway and Sweden. The study found that content provided on social media was used by news media and helped to set the agenda. Social media acted as a mediator between news media and agenda setting. News media used social media to collect factual statements and photos of individuals. The study also reported that an Australian newspaper mentioned more tweets regarding election campaign in articles rather than other newspapers.

Eijaz (2013) focused his research on the use of social media by political parties in Pakistan and its influence on the dynamics of political affairs. The study also focused on how university students were using political content available on social media. The study found that there exist a strong correlation between political mobilization and social media in Pakistan especially among the youth of the country. Observed data also showed that Facebook was playing a major role in

the transfer of political content rather than other social media websites. The study also highlighted that due to low literacy levels in the country and frequent electricity outages, the effect of new media is narrow on political mobilization.

### 3. Research Methodology

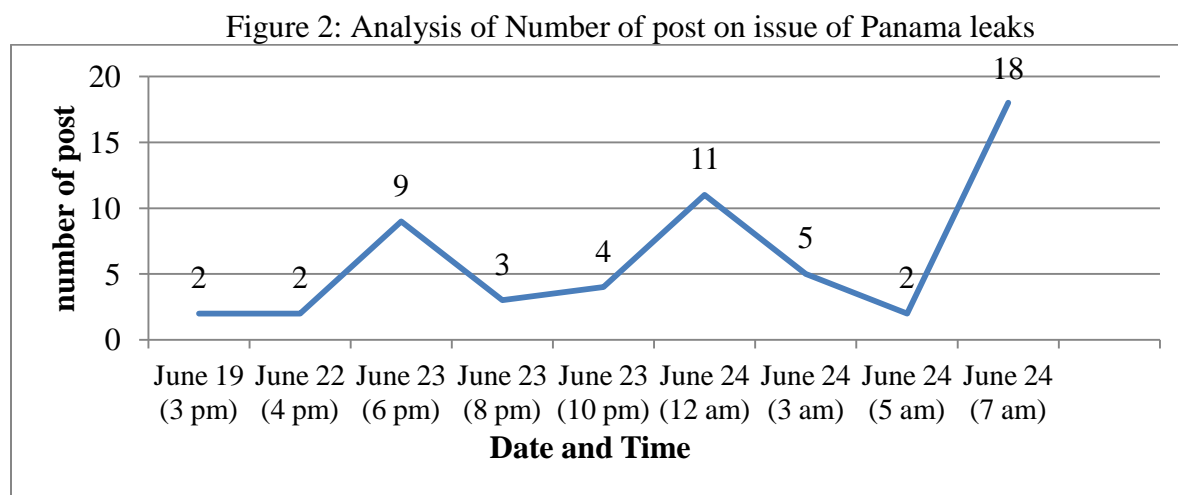
The present research adopts case study methodology. Four case studies were chosen to clearly specify and understand the relationship between social media and policy making. For this purpose, tweets available on twitter and documents related to case studies were assumed to be reliable, as traditional media users also refer to the tweets available on twitter (Barthel, Michael, Shearer, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2015). For clear understanding, firstly the background of the case studies were studied and later trend analysis was done. The cases selected for analysis were Panama Leaks, Transgender case of Alisha, Malnutrition in Baluchistan and Honor killing case of Zeenat Bibi.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The present section provides trend analysis of the four cases adopted by the study. The time span of trend analysis is one week for which data were gathered.

#### *Case 1 Panama Leaks*

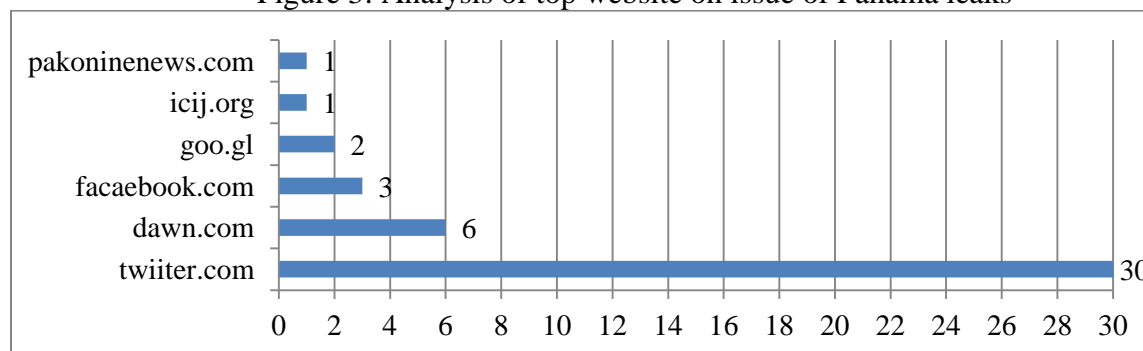
Data is generated from Keyhole site that is used by citizens to know about the trend analysis of specific trend. The trend line shows the number of post from June, 19. 2016 to June, 24. 2016. The major number of post is tweeted on June 24 at 7 am. Figure 2 shows the number of posts that were posted on panama leaks.



Source: Keyhole.com

Figure 3 shows that top websites that posted more tweets about panama leak. Twitter is at top in highlighting the issue. Afterward Dawn.com and Face book highlighted the issue.

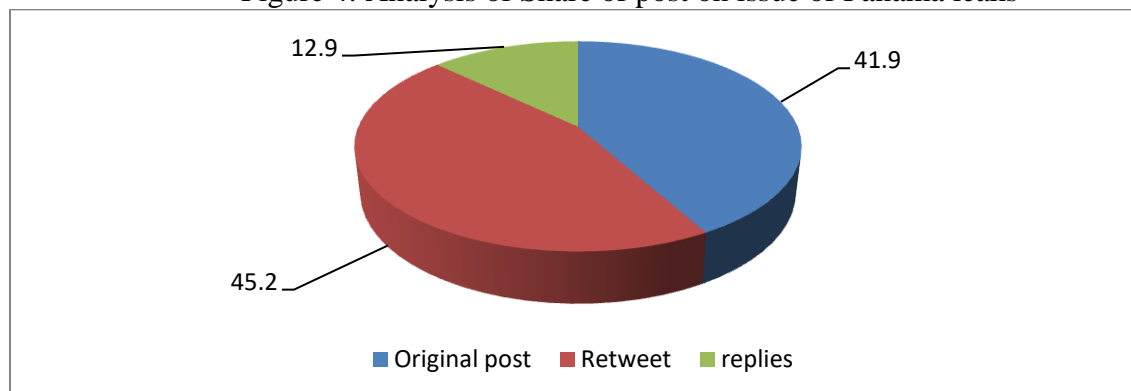
Figure 3: Analysis of top website on issue of Panama leaks



Source: Keyhole.com

Figure 4 indicates the percentage share of posts. Original tweets were 41.9 percent. Retweet posts include 45.2 percent and replies on tweets were 12.9 percent.

Figure 4: Analysis of Share of post on issue of Panama leaks



Source: Keyhole.com

The issue of Panama leaks arose in April, 2016 and with it all political parties came to action. More than 200 Pakistani politicians and businessmen were indicated having off-shore companies. The prominent among the list were children of the then Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, which created uproar in the country by various political parties. One of the major alternative suggestions given by opposition parties was to have a forensic audit of the offshore companies that were owned by Sharif family members. Another suggestion given by the Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) was to establish judicial commission headed by the chief justice of Pakistan and the report of the commission to be made public. The PTI leaders also demanded that federal bureau of investigation; election commission of Pakistan and State Bank of Pakistan should also play their vital role in this regard. Different suggestions received were investigation of the off-shore companies by well reputed international firm.

Imran Khan from his official twitter account posted a tweet “Our stance vindicated again as Sharif’s wealth stashed abroad exposed. NAB, FBR & ECP must take action.” Imran Khan has 4 million followers and this post was retweeted 1,859 times and 2,857 users liked the post.

Another tweet generated on panama leak was: “There is question mark on intents, interest and integrity of Pakistan.” The post was retweeted for 171 times and was liked by 384 users.

PTI leader Imran Khan said the government should form a commission headed by a chief justice of Pakistan and international audit firm should be hired to uncover the corrupt members of Panama leaks. PTI leader on twitter said “we need to involve forensic investigators who can look into white collar corruption.”

Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif wrote a letter to the Chief justice of Pakistan to head the judicial commission and investigate the matter of Panama leak in the background of intense pressure imposed by the opposition parties after the massive leak of Panama papers by Mosack Fonseca. The judicial commission announced by the prime minister would investigate the matter against the claim made in Panama leaks. Further, the judicial commission can also get help from international audit firm for which funds will be allocated by the Federal Government of Pakistan. However, Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali refused to probe the commission because of the TORs mentioned by the government were too wide and will take many years to reach any conclusion with the current TOR.

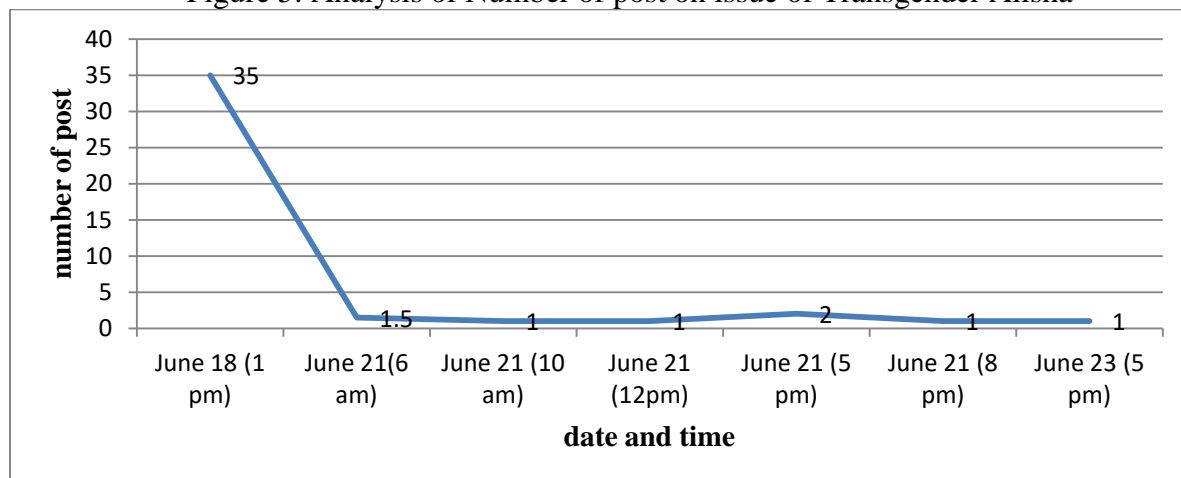
The mounting pressure from the political parties and citizens through social media, judicial commission was formulated that found Prime Minister and his children involved in the off-shore companies. The Supreme Court of Pakistan found Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif guilty and was found ineligible to hold public office. Currently, the case of ex-Prime Minister Mian Muhaamad Nawaz Sharif and his children is being heard in the Accountability Court and is one of the trends on twitter.com.

#### *Case 2: Issue of Transgender Alisha*

In 2016, Alisha’s case was registered as fifth case against transgender violence in KPK. Alisha was the coordinator of transgender alliance committee in Peshawar and was shot dead. She was one of the eight members of the community that worked for the rights of the transgender community.

After she was shot, she was transferred to Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) but the doctors refused to treat her because of the gender issue. The patients and the hospital staff were not willing to shift her in any ward because the wards were specified for male and female. There were no special wards for the transgender community. The members of the transgender community were running in the hospital after the staff to save her, but to no vain. After her death, the community members turned towards social media to protest.

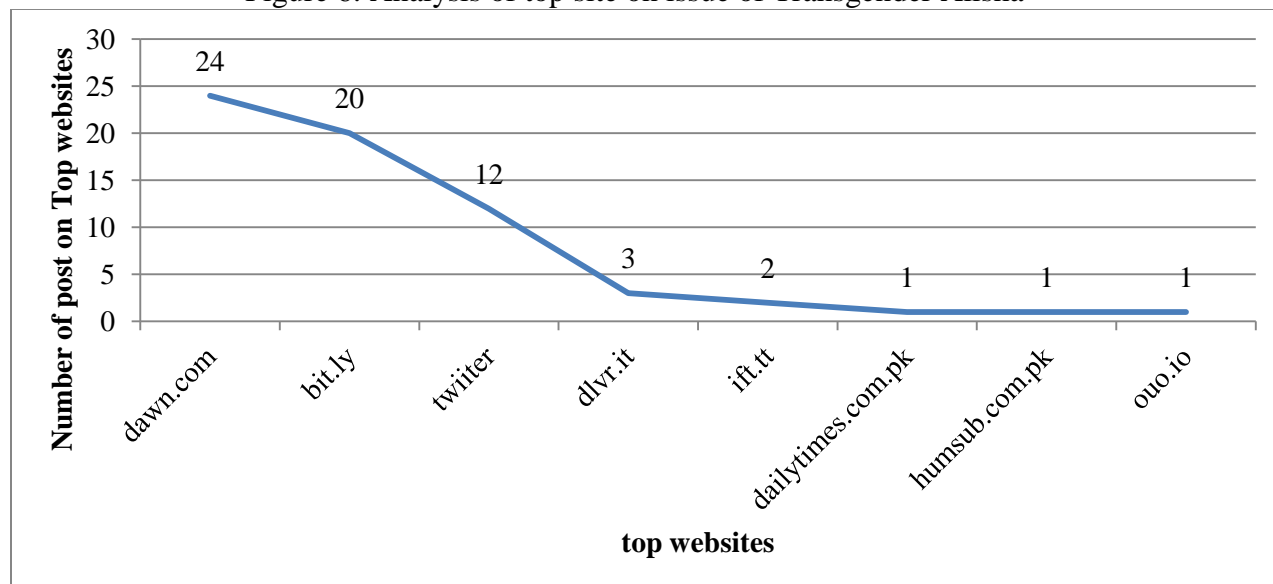
Figure 5: Analysis of Number of post on issue of Transgender Alisha



Source: Keyhole.com

Figure shows (6) that tops sites that posted more about Transgender case of Alisha. Dawn is at top in highlighting the issue. Afterward bit.ly and twitter highlighted the issue.

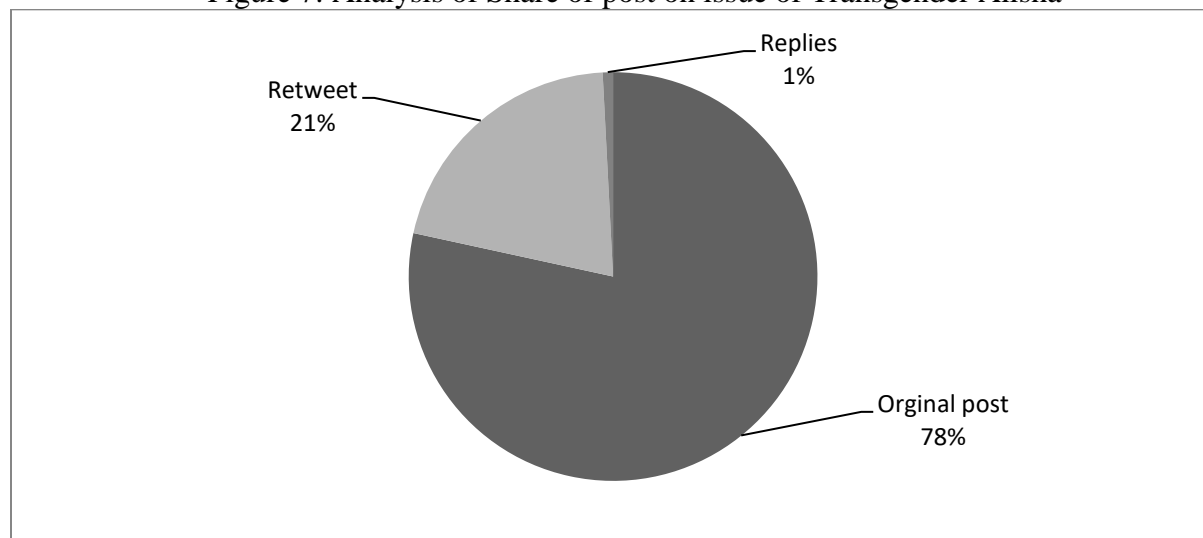
Figure 6: Analysis of top site on issue of Transgender Alisha



Source: Keyhole.com

Figure (7) indicates the share number of post in percentage. Original tweets were 77 percent. Retweet post includes 20.4 percent and replies on tweets were 0.8 percent.

Figure 7: Analysis of Share of post on issue of Transgender Alisha



Source: Keyhole.com

Some of the tweets regarding the protest are mentioned below:



“What happened to Alisha and her Transgender fellows in Peshawar is inhumane. #Alisha #JusticeForAlisha #AlishaRIP”

“Reminder: transgender people are human beings with human lives, too. This is an act of belligerency. #RIP”

The user has more than 12000 followers. The post was retweeted 27 times and liked by 44 users. The committee setup by the authorities to look into the murder of Alisha concluded that Alisha was shot dead by the gang and by the discrimination of authorities at LRH. The heart breaking case of Alisha once again shed light upon transgender community in Pakistan and their plight. With the murder, the Pakistani transgender community once again raised their voices for their rights. There are many such other cases that are being overlooked by the traditional media. They are also human and should be treated and respected like other gender. The transgender community is distinguished at every phase of life and almost 7 decades have passed but the mindset of people still is not changed. Why all the time after the bloodsheds we realize things?

This time transgender community raised their voices through social media. The problem was identified from the social media, people raised their voices and the protests held by the community reaped benefits. Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa (KPK) government allocated 200 million from the annual budget 2016-2017, towards welfare of the transgender community. It was a radical change for the entire community because previously they had been working hard to get recognition of their rights.

#Let'sRespectTheThirdGender

#AcceptDiversity

Some of the tweets that are regarding the policy decision made by the KPK government are below mentioned

“Finally good news: #KPK gov has allocated Rs200 million to the welfare of the trans community! #JusticeForAlisha #EndTransphobia #Pakistan”

The trend line shows the number of post from June, 15, 2016 to June, 22, 2016. Almost all the tweets are generated by male. All the original post were retweeted

### *Case 3: Honor Killing*

Zeenat Rafiq at age 18 was burned alive by her own mother and brother for bringing disgrace to the name of the family by marrying a person of her own choice. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 1276 women were victims of honor killings from Feb. 2014 to Feb. 2016. 170 women were below the age of 18. The plight of women can be seen from the fact that only 400 cases were registered under honor killing during the period.

Figure 8 shows top sites that posted more about no more killing girls. Twitter is at top in highlighting the issue. Afterward Dailymail.co.uk highlighted the issue.

The hashtag #nomorekillinggirls was used by many Pakistanis to highlight the issue in parliament some of the tweets are:

“They are killing minds and souls,” wrote one user in Karachi.

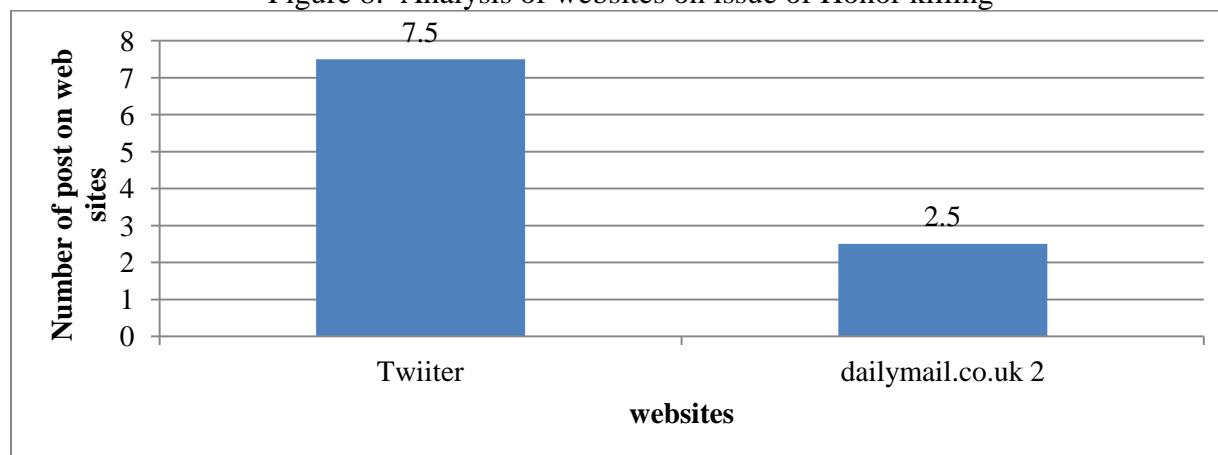
“Killing your flesh and blood are no better than devil themselves #NoMoreKillingGirls #JusticeForZeenat”

The user has more than 8000 followers the post was retweeted 20 times and the post was like by 27 users.

“NoMoreKillingGirls Sherry's Call Attention notice in the Senate. Chairman allowed demands 2 pass law.Govt must act!”

The user has more than 1000 followers the post was also retweeted by Bakhtwar Zardri.

Figure 8: Analysis of websites on issue of Honor killing



Source: Keyhole.com

Zeenat Bibi case has drawn the attention of many Pakistanis on social media because it was a rare case in which mother is involved in killing her own child. During the three months preceding the murder of Zeenat Bibi, two other cases were registered in which women were burned to death. Sharmin Obaid Chinnoy, who won Oscar for her documentary on “A Girl in River: The Price of forgiveness”, also highlighted the issue of honor killing. Pakistani Prime Minister, also announced that amendments will be made in law against honor killings.

The issue of honor killing became top trend on twitter and other social media, that pressurized government to pass the bill of Women Violence in Pakistan. The bill that was passed contained strict laws for those who are criminals of domestic violence. The bill was opposed by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, who termed the law as against Islamic perspective and against the constitution of Pakistan.

After the passage of the bill, citizens, journalist and politicians started evaluating the policy and tweeting against and for the policy decision made by the government. Some of the tweets are: “Any such extremists recommendations by #CII will put #Pakistan in more trouble when all religions r being misinterpreted widely in the world” #womenprotetionbill”

Even The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) consider the bill unconstitutional and against two nation theory in Pakistan. CII will review the bill and will give useful suggestion against the bill. The issue of honor killing, once again rose to prominence when well know social media model Qandeel Baloch, was murdered in the name of honor along with the burining of Maria Sadaqat in Murree, Ambreen in Abbottabad, and Nazia Hameed in Kasur in the name of honor. These cases compelled Pakistani Parliament in joint sitting to pass laws against honor killings and anti-rape laws, which were pending for quite some times.

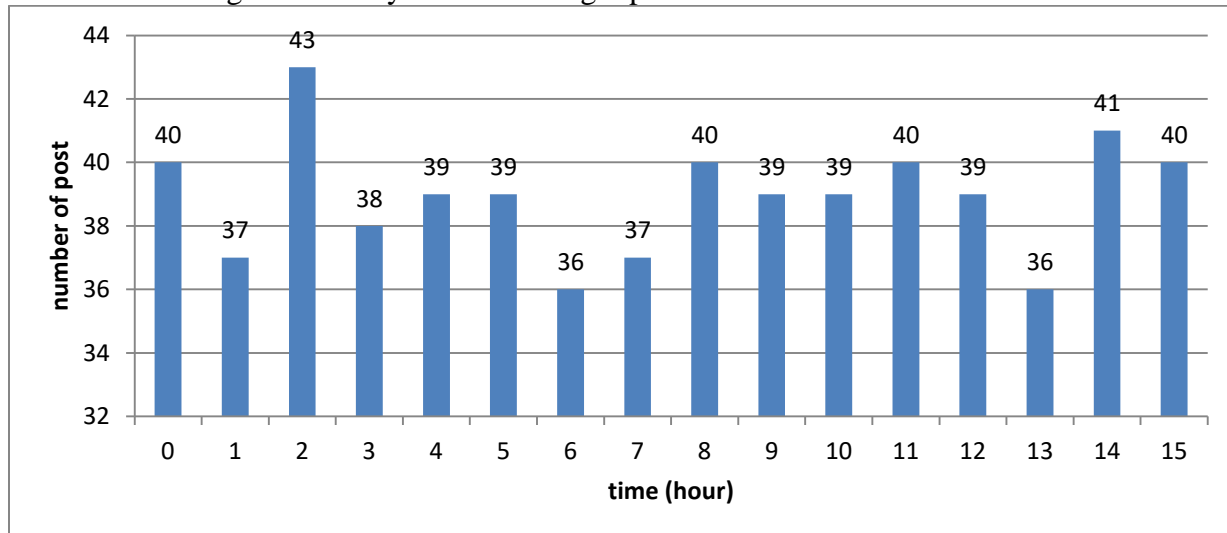
#### Case 4: Malnutrition in Baluchistan

The issue of malnutrition in Baluchistan was highlighted by social media activities. The data is collected from **Trendinalia Pakistan**. This page gives information about twitter and trending topics in Pakistan. Social media activist highlighted the campaign malnutrition in Baluchistan on twitter when the malnutrition in Baluchistan reached alarming situation. The campaign was raised by the activist to bring awareness on this threatening issue. Hashtags malnutrition was used on twitter to carry out the campaign. Tweets were not just only tweeted by the people of

Baluchistan but also from other regions of Pakistan. Different aspects are highlighted in the trend to evoke policymakers to take decision regarding malnutrition in Pakistan.

Figure 9 shows that Malnutrition in Baluchistan was trending topic for 14 hour in Pakistan on 21 April, 2016.

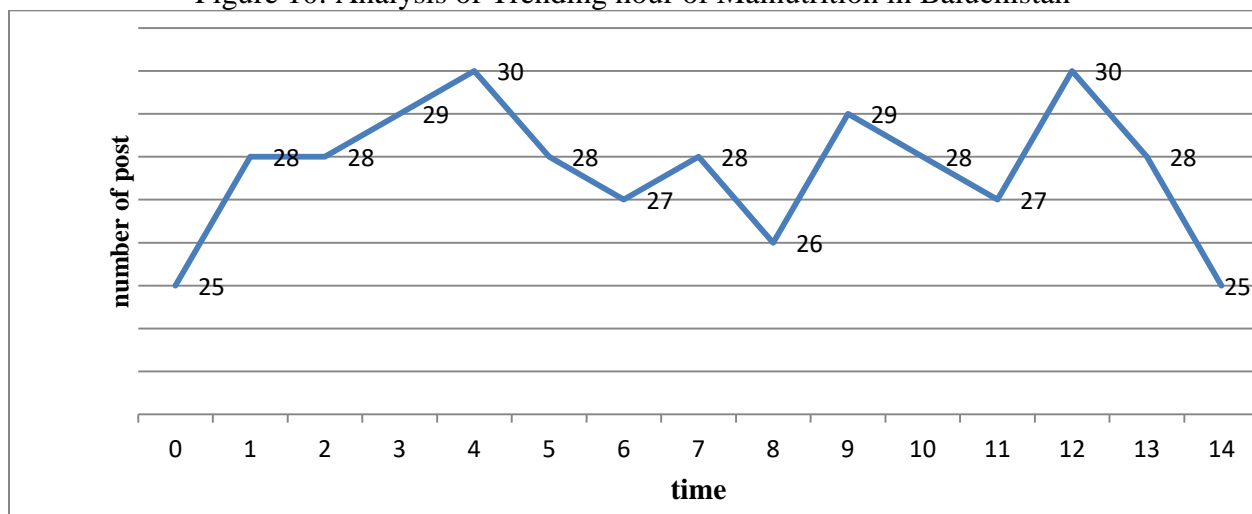
Figure 9: Analysis of Trending topic of Malnutrition in Baluchistan



Source :Trendinalia Pakistan

Figure 10 shows that the malnutrition is trending from 0 hour to 14:25 hour

Figure 10: Analysis of Trending hour of Malnutrition in Baluchistan



Source :Trendinalia Pakistan

Malnutrition is becoming a huge national problem, which needs to be addressed with proper policies and strategies. Baluchistan being abundant in resources is yet to receive its due share and focus of the federal government. According to United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), 16

percent of children in Baluchistan are malnourished. In 2014, World Health Organization (WHO) had also declared a state of emergency in Baluchistan in view of the indicators of Global Acute Malnutrition. The issue was raised on twitter and got highlighted in the government circles.

Baluchistan authorities responsible for health care and nutrition accepted their irresponsibility. Authorities said that they were unable to reach districts as their approach was just limited to five districts of Baluchistan. Situation in Baluchistan is so adverse even then we are unable to know the exact figure of malnourished people in the districts due to lack of facilities available, lack of trained labor, scarcity of resources and because of no proper implementation of law and order situation in the province. Some of the major tweets are mentioned on twitter related to #MalnutritionInBalochistan

“It's the 21st century we are a nuclear power but still hunger haunts kids in Baluchistan focus badly needed by government #MalnutritionInBalochistan”

The user has 11 thousand followers. The post was tweeted 10 times and liked by 12 users.

“#WHO should concentrate on #Malnutrition issues in #Balochistan #MalnutritionInBalochistan”

“Treating Malnutrition in children under the age of 5 is essential. This improves their chances of survival while their immune system is still developing. #MalnutritionInBalochistan”

“NGOs should work and establish new projects and techniques to fulfill the nutritional needs in #Balochistan #MalnutritionInBalochistan”

The issue was discussed to such an extent that it was taken up by the government. Aforementioned tweets describe that citizens want government, International organizations and NGO's to take protective measure. The current government of PML-N took action to start projects on nutrition in 15 different districts of Baluchistan. However, the figure was decreased to 7 districts. Astonishingly, no project is yet started. Multi-sectoral strategy on nutrition was accepted but unnecessary delay is caused by planning and development department (PDD)

The present government launched Scaling UP Nutrition (SUN) with the help of Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to reduce the problem of malnutrition in the entire province. The government had the collaboration with the private flour and oil mills to deal with the issue of malnutrition in Baluchistan. The minister of health gave the direction to flour mill owners, to provide the flour and oil of acceptable quality. National Assembly member from Baluchistan, Abdul Qahar stated that providing nutrition food is the major responsibility of the government and highest priority should be given by the government to nutrition projects as it is a part of vision plan 2025.

One of the cost-effective methods to reduce malnutrition is to work on food fortification projects. If food standards are raised, there will be significant changes in the status of children and women. Director of National Fortification Alliance (NFA) said that ministers are aware of the adverse situation in the province so they are in favor of food fortification programs. Director of GAIN said they have launched regional food fortification program for Baluchistan in which they will manufacture and provide fortified food and other edibles to citizens of Baluchistan and Afghanistan.

The government adopted the policy to work with the collaboration of private stake holders to provide citizens with fortified wheat and edible oil. Large number of users on social media highlighted the issue.

The above discussed cases are some of the cases that have been highlighted in social media such as twitter and that contributed towards formal policy making by the government. Table 1 indicates different stages of policy making affected by these issues.

Table 1: Cases at Different Stages of Policy Making

Cases	Policy Making Process
Transgender Case of Alisha	Problem identified by social media. KPK government took positive action for welfare of transgender community.
Panama Leaks	Government and opposition parties dialogue. Supreme Court took action and the cases are now being heard in Accountability Court. This has lead to various cases of corruption being opened against politicians and bureaucrats.
Malnutrition in Baluchistan	Government took action and involved different stakeholders to implement nutrition projects in Baluchistan.
Honour Killing of Zeenat Bibi	Effective Policy Debate between different stakeholders held and laws passed by parliament to eradicate the menace of honor-killing in the country.

## 5. Conclusion

Social media such as twitter and like are creating a wider impact on policy making processes not only in Pakistan but across the world by involving policy makers and governments in the debates that are deemed important by the society. Governments are putting their interest in citizens needs through social media. The present study finds that social media is not just creating impact at the problem identification stage, but also at different stages of agenda setting, formulation, and evaluation phases of policy making. Social media is used by many citizens and therefore, helps in identifying issues that are not picked up by the main stream traditional or electronic media. The users of twitter tweet to evoke policy makers to take the decision regarding their needs and desires and is used as a platform to tell the policy makers regarding the decision made in parliament by tweeting against or for on certain policy debates and decisions.

The study was exploratory in nature to study the impact of social media on policy making in Pakistan and used contextual case study strategy. Many trends are available on twitter that highlights different issues plaguing our society, however, not all could be covered. Being exploratory in nature, we used only one week data to study the trend and conduct trend analysis. In future longer span of time could be covered to study trend analysis of various issues. Furthermore, other social media such as Facebook, Instagram etc. could also be included to study various issues and conduct trend analysis. Another potential area of investigation could be issues that are being debated on social media and electronic media and do a comparison between them and their impact on policy making in Pakistan. Another research avenue could be a comparative study of social media and its influence on policy making in different countries.

**Author biography:** Fiaz Hussain is associated with Fatima Jinnah Women University as a Lecturer. He is currently doing his Ph.D. in Public Policy from National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan. His research interests include public policy, social policy and governance.

Bushra Qureshi is a graduate of Department of Public Administration, Fatima Jinnah Women University. Her research interests include public policy, social policy and policy analysis.

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